



*Always Ready  
Always There*

# *The Gem State Guardian*

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## **ASOS calls in Apache air strikes during live-fire exercise**

by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Pokorney  
124th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Boise, Idaho -- Radios chatter atop a rocky peak at the arid Orchard Combat Training Center as Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) Specialists call in precise radio commands to the pilot of an approaching AH-64 Apache Longbow helicopter. Within seconds crackling 30mm bullets rain down on a hapless white sedan target in the distance. It wobbles on its broke-down chassis while the barrage of 30mm rounds rip through windows and doors as the Apache charges closer.

The crackling stops and the air is still for a brief moment; just long enough for the enlisted TACPs to hear their own breath and watch a thin trail of smoke streak from the helicopter toward the sedan. The Flechette rocket, moving faster than sound, explodes on the ground in front of the doomed sedan, in a burst of red smoke, dust and silence. Nail-like projectiles escape the plume and rock the sad sedan carcass while the thundering boom of the explosion finally rolls over the observers like a slow wave.

This was just one of many training scenarios that played out while TACPs and air liaison officers with the 124th Air Support Operations Squadron (ASOS) trained with the active duty Army 16th Combat Aviation Brigade from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. at the OCTC near Boise, Idaho Nov. 1.

"Talking to a real pilot, communicating in a way that helps them understand what I'm looking at, from a different perspective; listening to how the pilots communicate, getting used to the way they talk, and the 'pilot lingo,' and having a real aircraft fly the tactics they would use in a real combat situation, all make the training invaluable for me," said Airman 1st Class Jesse Van Patten, 124th ASOS, TACP.

During this training, several airmen including Van Patten, who just recently returned from his technical school, had the opportunity to train on the microphone, talking to the aircraft, and guiding live attacks on to targets. They took turns practicing that mission, talking to the strike aircraft and learning from each other by observing, doing and teaching.

"I just called an AH-64, gave coordinates to, and confirmed a target. I told him where friendly forces were, and how to avoid them," Van Patten recounts. "Shortly after two Apaches pop up from behind the hill and riddle a building with rockets and 30mm rounds. I tell the pilot, 'good effects, you're approved immediate re-attack.' Was this rewarding? I think so."



Airman 1st Class Neil Mooney, Tactical Air Control Party Specialist from the 124th Air Support Operations Squadron, watches simulated enemy targets at the observation point as he calls in Apache helicopters to strike simulated enemy targets to active duty Army troops from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA. Orchard Training Combat Center near Boise. Idaho Nov. 1, 2013.

"The TACPs are Air Force personnel with two functions: 1) as a liaison between the Air Force and the Army, 2) as command and control to the aircraft assets," said 2nd Lt. Robert Steiner, 124th ASOS, Joint Terminal Attack Controller (JTAC). "We liaise with the Army to find out what the ground commander's needs are, we execute to meet those needs as far as putting strike aircraft munitions on target, where the ground commander wants, when he wants, the way he wants it."

ASOS Airmen provide air support to ground troops by calling in fire from a variety of aircraft including the Air Force fixed wing attack aircraft like the A-10 Thunderbolt II, F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon as well as rotary wing attack aircraft like the Army AH-

64 Apache Longbow helicopter and more. Just a few weeks earlier the ASOS airmen were working with German Tornado GR4s.

"We can literally work with any kind of aircraft and that's what makes the job so challenging and interesting. One day I could be working with Belgian F-16s and the next day German GR4s and after that, these U.S. active duty Apache helicopters," said Steiner.

1st Lt. Brad Mcadams, a platoon leader with B Company, 1-229th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 16th Combat Aviation Brigade, explained that the 30 troops conducting training with ASOS were from a group of 200 Soldiers from the 16th CAB, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. training here at Gowen Field. One company of Apache helicopters and two companies of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters have spent a month here training. In addition to close combat attack training they conducted high-altitude training in the Idaho Mountains, which helped their pilots safely fly and land helicopters in high-altitudes.

"This event is a good example of the training that is absolutely critical to prepare both us and the aircrew for war; there is no better way to learn how to effectively employ lethal fires accurately and timely than to actually go out and do it. It is also a great example of two services working together in Joint Operations," said Steiner.